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APPLETON MODERN PLAYS

Edited by Frank Shay

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LORD BYRON



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LORD BYRON

A PLAY IN EIGHT SCENES

BY

MAURICE FERBER

812

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D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK :: 1924 :: LONDON

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LORD BYRON

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CHARACTERS

(In order of their appearance)

LADY MELBOURNE [*aunt of ANNABEL MILBANKE*]
THOMAS MOORE [*the poet; friend of LORD BYRON*]
LADY MORGAN
ANNABEL MILBANKE [*later LADY BYRON*]
LADY CAROLINE LAMB [*a love of LORD BYRON*]
MR. HOBHOUSE [*traveler and author; friend of LORD BYRON*]
LORD BYRON
JACKSON [*boxing instructor of LORD BYRON*]
FLETCHER [*servant of LORD BYRON*]
FIRST GUEST
SECOND GUEST
A BAILIFF
AUGUSTA LEIGH [*half sister of LORD BYRON*]
CLARE CLAIMONT [*a later love of LORD BYRON*]
MARIANNA SEGATI [*ditto*]
MARGARITA COGNI [*ditto*]
TERESA GUICCIOLI [*ditto*]
Guests in Scene I and Scene III. LORD BYRON's servants in Scene VI. Miscellaneous women of the street in Scene VII.

SYNOPSIS

TIME: *From early in the second decade of the Nineteenth Century to early in the third decade.*
PLACE: *London for Scenes I to VI and Scene VIII. Venice for Scene VII.*
SCENE I. *Melbourne House, Whitehall, overlooking the Park.*

LORD BYRON

SCENE II. LORD BYRON'S *bachelor lodgings.*

SCENE III. *Same as Scene I.*

SCENE IV. LORD BYRON'S *rented house, Piccadilly Terrace.*
The library.

SCENE V. *Same as Scene IV.*

SCENE VI. *Same as Scene IV.*

SCENE VII. *A room in the Palazzo Moncenigo.*

SCENE VIII. *In AUGUSTA'S home.*

SCENE ONE

TIME: *A spring evening.*

PLACE: *Melbourne House, Whitehall, overlooking the Park.*

[*On the right an interior with palms and sofa. The rest of the stage is a drawing-room of the highest social position, which opens with folding doors into another room, which latter terminates in a veranda. In the rear room dance music is heard, waltzes and quadrilles prevailing. In the drawing-room conversation.*

As the curtain rises, there is animated discussion, laughter, music, and dancing. Every one seems to be on tiptoe with expectancy. LADY MELBOURNE moves about like a perfect hostess. She is distinguished, the remains of a beautiful woman, sixty-one years old, not over-principled, with the methods of worldly wisdom and experience.

THOMAS MOORE is a merry little man of thirty-two, with a large head full of bumps, affable, warm-hearted, humor loving. He has a habit of pronouncing his *r*'s very clearly.

LADY MORGAN, thirty-five, is very small and slight, with a drooping figure. Suspicious-looking curls drip down upon her slight throat. She is always retiring behind her green fan, as if she had the consciousness that she was half blind and needed to protect her eyes from bright lights.

ANNE ISABELLA MILBANKE, commonly known as ANNABEL, twenty, is far from fashionable yet not unattractive, rather

formal, rather self-complacent, retiring, rather unimaginative, reflective, prudent. She wears a long and high dress.

LADY CAROLINE LAMB, *twenty-seven, is a clever, romantic, impulsive, imaginative woman of high birth, highest fashion, and of irresistible beauty, with her fascinatingly small, slight figure, golden hair, large hazel eyes, and low musical voice. There is in her no mental force, no moral fiber, but she is just a saucy, freakish, gushing creature. She wears a maze of soft white muslin.*]

MOORE (*with firm conviction*). Shakespeare and Byron it will always be—after this.

LADY MORGAN (*provoked*). I hadn't read but the first Canto of "Childe Harold," when the book mysteriously disappeared. I hope the thief goes blind with reading it too often.

ANNABEL (*gushing*). I've just finished it! Such pictures! Such passion! Such melody! They say Murray, the publisher, had to order a second edition the very first day of publication—that's two weeks ago.

MOORE. That will be only the beginning. Mark my words.

LADY CAROLINE (*saucily*). They say he is a very handsome poet—(*looking at MOORE pointedly*)—not like another poet I know.

MOORE (*laughing*). There, thank Heaven, I am like Cæsar's wife—above suspicion—of beauty.

LADY MELBOURNE. The lion seems to be late.

MOORE. He's always late—wherever he goes. They say he sleeps every day till afternoon. But better that he should sleep than that his readers should.

LADY MELBOURNE (*to MOORE*). Come, sweet singer, you fill in the interim.

MOORE (*pretending chagrin*). I'm nothing but a stop gap, am I?

LADY MELBOURNE. No, Mr. Moore, you are a nightingale, and your brother nightingale is soon to arrive; and you

will sing together, and the whole world will mistake my drawing-room for Parnassus.

(MOORE *is much pleased, but still hesitates.*)

LADY MELBOURNE (*laughing*). He never sings until lots of pretty women press around him. This way, ladies. (*After the ladies have gathered around MOORE—imperiously.*) Come, Mr. Moore.

MOORE (*bowing*). When a queen of society commands, I must obey. (*Inquiringly.*) The new song, Lady Melbourne?

LADY MELBOURNE. The very newest one, of course.

(*The crowd follows after MOORE, as he goes to seat himself at a huge grand piano. There he plays softly almost a nominal accompaniment, singing the following song in a voice of no compass, yet exquisitely musical.*)

MOORE.

Believe me, if all those endearing young charms
Which I gaze on so fondly to-day
Were to change by to-morrow, and fleet in my arms
Like fairy gifts fading away,
Thou wouldst still be adored, as this moment thou art,
Let thy loveliness fade as it will,
And around the dear ruin each wish of my heart
Would entwine itself verdantly still.

It is not while beauty and youth are thine own,
And thy cheeks unprofaned by a tear
That the fervor and faith of a soul can be known
To which time will but make thee more dear;
No, the heart that has truly loved never forgets,
But as truly loves on to the close,
As the sunflower turns on her god, when he sets,
The same look which she turned when he rose.

(*When he has finished, the audience is extremely congratulatory, crying "Exquisite," "Lovely," "Perfectly charming," "One of your very best, Mr. Moore," etc.*)

LADY MORGAN. I just wish I had my little harp here,

bless the dear little Irishman. I'm glad it wasn't another sad song, like—what was that you sang the other day?

MOORE. "'Tis the last rose of summer"?

LADY MORGAN. Yes, that's it. It was terribly disheartening. Look ahead to the first rose, never behind to the last.

MOORE. That's why you have such roses in your cheeks, Lady Morgan.

LADY MORGAN. M-m-m. Yes—and no. (*Humorously.*) I'm afraid the roses I have come from the pinch tree.

MOORE (*puzzled*). Pinch trees? I've heard of peach trees, but pray tell me what are pinch trees?

LADY MORGAN. For a poet you should know your botany better. This is a pinch tree.

(*She pinches her cheeks, to every one's amusement.*)

(*Enter HOBHOUSE and BYRON. They are of an age—about twenty-four. HOBHOUSE is distinctly dark and handsome. BYRON's halting gait is apparent, for he can never put his heels on the ground, and has to pick his way on his toes. Nevertheless, he moves about with great quickness, in order to cover up his deformity.*)

BYRON, dressed as a dandy, is astonishingly beautiful. His form is slender and of medium height. His curly hair advances over his noble forehead in graceful ringlets. His brow is white; his usually pale complexion is delicate, even to transparency. His countenance, especially in the mouth and eyes, is remarkable for mobility and expressiveness. Indeed, his mouth is a sensitive feminine mouth; his ears are extremely small; so are his hands. Generally his costume includes a studied negligency of collar and a flowing neck cloth, which exposes his throat. There is normally a winning charm in his voice and manner.)

LADY MELBOURNE (*who has rushed over to welcome HOBHOUSE and BYRON*). Mr. Hobhouse! Lord Byron! I'm so glad to see you both!

HOBHOUSE (*sotto voce*). I'm sorry to be so late. I had to wait for Lord Byron. Late he is always—when we were

in Spain, he was late; in Albania; in Greece; always late.

BYRON (*irritated*). Hobhouse, am I to be introduced before all these strange eyes stare me out of countenance?

LADY MELBOURNE. A thousand pardons, Lord Byron. They are not stares, but rather glances of admiration. (*Introducing.*) This is Miss Anne Isabella Milbanke, my brother's only child, usually called Annabel. She's a rival of yours—she writes.

ANNABEL (*abashed*). I write only for myself.

BYRON (*as he shakes hands with her—graciously*). Isn't that what we all do?

(ANNABEL *smiles at him gratefully.*)

LADY MELBOURNE. And here is Thomas Moore.

BYRON. Oh, Moore and I are already friends. We've had many a good quarrel already.

MOORE (*laughing*). And many a good bumper.

LADY MELBOURNE. And this is Lady Morgan.

BYRON (*as if recollecting something*). Oh, yes, Lady Morgan. Let me see. You're the lady who, when you first came to London, always carried a little Irish harp with you wherever you went.

LADY MORGAN (*tittering*). Yes, I did. (*Regretfully.*) And I am so sorry I didn't bring it to-night to accompany dear Mr. Moore. He sang such a lovely song.

LADY CAROLINE (*pushing herself forward and addressing LADY MELBOURNE poutingly*). Isn't your little daughter-in-law to have a teeny share in the great man?

LADY MELBOURNE (*to BYRON*). Lady Caroline Lamb, wife of my son, William Lamb.

LADY CAROLINE (*looking at BYRON keenly*). Bad.

(*General laughter.*)

BYRON (*merrily*). Am I so bad?

LADY CAROLINE. And even perhaps—a little mad.

(*The crowd is startled at this bold speech.*)

BYRON (*a little taken aback*). That must be the poet in me.

LADY MORGAN (*lightly to BYRON*). They say you're a dangerous man for a woman to know.

HOBHOUSE. For that matter, it's dangerous for any man to know any woman.

BYRON. But it's only through danger that one acquires bravery.

LADY CAROLINE (*tantalizingly*). Just how brave are you, Lord Byron?

BYRON. You must first show me the danger.

LADY CAROLINE. And the greater the danger, the greater your bravery?

BYRON (*slyly*). Even so.

LADY CAROLINE (*as if summing up*). Mad, bad, and dangerous to know.

LADY MELBOURNE (*to ANNABEL*). Annabel.

ANNABEL. Yes, Aunt Elizabeth.

LADY MELBOURNE. We should all be dancing again. (*To BYRON.*) Perhaps, my lord, you will be so good as to—

BYRON (*knitting his brows and scowling*). I don't dance, my lady.

LADY MELBOURNE (*noticing his irritation*). I'm so sorry, Lord Byron. (*Winningly.*) But you needn't feel you will be neglected if you do sit out the dances. Let me be the very first to have that distinguished honor. Come over under the palms. You'll like it there. We'll sit on the sofa.

BYRON. Thank you, Lady Melbourne, you're very kind.

(*They cross to the palms and seat themselves as the others go off into the inner room.*)

LADY MELBOURNE. How fascinating these new dances are!

BYRON. Yes, many a maiden will now have to waltz her way to a husband.

LADY MELBOURNE. To you, perhaps? You know, we old women are born matchmakers.

BYRON (*laughing*). I am poor.

LADY MELBOURNE. What! With Newstead Abbey and your Rochdale property—and a seat in the House of Lords.

BYRON. As to the seat, the best thing about it is that,

when I'm sitting in it, it's being sat in by a Whig, and not by a Tory.

LADY MELBOURNE. Charming! Yet I should have asked you here, even had you been a Tory, because your poetry is so supremely wonderful, though it is true Melbourne House is practically closed to Tories.

BYRON. You are very gracious. And as to the Abbey, it's in ruins. I've spent more than my income in restorations. And then my two years of travel on the Continent with Hobhouse. No, no, Lady Melbourne, I shall always be a merry bachelor.

LADY MELBOURNE (*sympathetically*). It doesn't seem right that money should be a bother to you—you with your genius.

BYRON. As to genius, it's true I hope to be remembered in my country's verses, if that's what you mean. As to money being a bother to me, a strange thought occurred to me the other day. You know when Murray the publisher paid me six hundred pounds for "Childe Harold," I turned the money right over to a poor scribbler friend of mine who needed help. Murray was amazed. He asked me why I hadn't kept it. I said I was a peer of England, and no peer of England could properly take money for his writings. Yet I couldn't help but see how the money I gave away would have helped me with my debts.

LADY MELBOURNE. And to a wife?

BYRON (*laughing*). If you would have it so. You are very insistent.

LADY MELBOURNE. I am not proposing to you, though I understand an old lady whom you met in Spain wept when you went away.

BYRON (*laughing*). Like Noah's flood. She was fifty-six. And she cut off a lock of my hair as well.

(LADY CAROLINE *enters from inner room, and goes to the palm-shaded recess.*)

LADY CAROLINE (*beaming on them*). Do I intrude?

(BYRON *rises.*)

LADY MELBOURNE. No, Caro. You stay with Lord

Byron while I see if the refreshments are ready. *A bientôt, Lord Byron.*

(*Exit* LADY MELBOURNE. LADY CAROLINE *sits*. BYRON *sits*.)

LADY CAROLINE (*as if trying to fascinate BYRON*). Did I intrude?

BYRON. Not if you promise to be charming.

LADY CAROLINE. And dangerous? Oh, Lord Byron—I adore those lines of yours.

(*Quotes from memory.*)

Maid of Athens, ere we part,
Give, oh, give me back my heart!
Or, since that has left my breast,
Keep it now and take the rest!
Hear my vow before I go,
Ζωή μου, οας αγαπω.

Do I say the last line right, Lord Byron?

BYRON. If it's Greek to you, you don't.

LADY CAROLINE. Just what does it mean in Greek?

BYRON (*hesitatingly*). Eh—er—I must be cautious. It means, Lady Caroline—"My life, I love you!"

LADY CAROLINE (*sighing with satisfaction*). Oh-h-h. Now you recite a stanza—the last one. I just love it to pieces.

BYRON. Very well, if you wish it.

(*Quotes.*)

Maid of Athens! I am gone:
Think of me, sweet! when alone.
Though I fly to Istambol,
Athens holds my heart and soul;
Can I cease to love thee? No!
Ζωή μου, οας αγαπω.

LADY CAROLINE (*sighing again*). "My life, I love thee"—wonderful, wonderful. (*To BYRON, impulsively.*) Come to see me to-morrow.

BYRON. When a very beautiful woman asks a man she has met for the very first time to come and see her the very next day, the man invariably asks, "And your husband?"

LADY CAROLINE (*laughing*). He'd welcome you. We've been married seven years.

BYRON. The number seven has always been mysteriously attractive to me.

LADY CAROLINE (*as if holding out a bait*). And I'll show you my baby.

BYRON. Oh, that seems harmless enough. Very well. I'm coming—but, mind you, only to see your baby.

LADY CAROLINE (*delighted*). Thank you so much, you dear, dear Lord Byron.

(LADY MORGAN *enters from inner room and approaches the couple.*)

LADY MORGAN (*with counterfeited surprise*). Oh, a tête-à-tête already? (*Shaking her finger warningly.*) No more for now. We shall have something to eat. (*Looking at BYRON incredulously.*) Oh, by the way, among the many rumors about you, my lord, there is one that you don't eat—like a tadpole.

BYRON. I'm more than a tadpole, yet less than a man. But truly, Lady Morgan, all I shall eat will be biscuits and soda water.

LADY MORGAN (*amazed*). Then it's true! Oh, dear, what will Lady Melbourne do? She'll be so distressed. She hasn't a thing like that in the house.

BYRON (*gallantly*). Then I'll feast my eyes on the pretty women.

LADY MORGAN (*archly*). You'll be tempted to overeat.

LADY CAROLINE (*merrily*). Then I'll stick close to Lord Byron and see that he doesn't.

(*All exeunt into inner room, gayly.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE TWO

TIME: *Some weeks later. Early afternoon.*

PLACE: LORD BYRON'S bachelor lodgings.

[*The room is furnished with masculine abandon. Boxing gloves, fencing foils. Door back center, leading into inner rooms. Window right.*]

As the curtain rises, there seems to be shouting in an inner room, and finally there come rushing out LORD BYRON and JACKSON, a respectable-looking and manly instructor in the art of self-defense. They continue the boxing more in fun than in seriousness.

During the following dialogue, they retire intermittently into the inner rooms, to get into other clothes.]

JACKSON. My lord, this will never do. You don't work hard enough. You could have landed on me if you'd been spryer.

BYRON (*throwing down the gloves gloomily*). Spryer—on these deformed feet!

JACKSON (*regretfully*). Pardon, my lord, I meant no harm. Your pluck is wonderful. But the way you used to come up, round after round, with the best of them, in spite of your feet, makes me think you're not tryin' as hard as you used to. You know, if you don't, you'll get fat again.

BYRON (*worried*). But I am *not* getting fat again, am I? Oh, Jackson, is it right that I should have inherited a tendency to stoutness from my mother? She ought to have been thin as a rail, when you stop to think of all the exercise she got by throwing dishes at me.

JACKSON (*laughing*). My lord, a mother's love stops at nothing to improve her offspring.

BYRON. And between throws, when she paused to take breath, she'd tell me I'd be as bad as my father.

JACKSON. My lord, all mothers tell their sons the same thing. That's the Old Eve in them.

BYRON (*with sudden pride*). But doubtless she derived her stoutness from her ancestors. She was descended from Scotch royalty, you know.

JACKSON. Yes, my lord, you have told me that many times. But I have a plenty of dukes and even of royal princes comin' to me for lessons.

BYRON. That's so, Jackson, I'm afraid I'm vain. Now, in all seriousness, you can't say I'm getting fat, Jackson, can you? I weigh only a hundred and thirty-seven. You remember me at the University? Two hundred, wasn't it?

JACKSON. Two hundred and two, my lord, to be exact.

BYRON (*figuring it out*). Five years and six months, since I was at Cambridge, makes sixty-six months. A hundred thirty-seven pounds from two hundred two makes sixty-five pounds. A loss of sixty-five pounds in sixty-six months, or a pound a month for over five years. (*Proudly.*) Isn't that wonderful! (*Laughing.*) Fat boy, they used to call me at school. Think of that! And look at my figure now—like Apollo.

(*Showing off his figure.*)

JACKSON (*shaking his head dubiously.*) And fat man they'll surely be callin' you, if you're not on your guard. My lord, I hope you're watchin' your diet carefully. Did you drink your vinegar and water this mornin'?

BYRON. Yes, Jack, but the doctors tell me I'll ruin my liver.

JACKSON (*looking BYRON down with authority*). Would you rather stay thin, or have your liver?

BYRON (*crushed*). Stay thin, of course.

JACKSON (*with a tone of finality*). Well! How long since you've had fish?

BYRON. Fish? Fish? Why, not since the day the immortal "Childe" was published. (*His eyes twinkling.*) Jackson, to change the subject, what should you do in a case like this? A nobleman of ancient lineage, owner of an historic abbey dating from Henry the Second, with parks and lakes

and therefore rich—if he didn't have so many debts—handsome—if he doesn't get fat—goes to sleep one night unknown, unloved. He wakes up in the morning and finds himself famous—the talk of the town, the idol of women. Wherever he goes, he hears shrill feminine cries of "Byron," "Byron." What should you do, if you were that lucky man?

JACKSON (*scratching his head*). I think I'd let the town go on talkin'—and then I'd take measures to protect myself from the women.

BYRON (*much amused*). I may have to do the second pretty soon. But do you know what I did?

JACKSON. Can't guess.

BYRON (*bursting out laughing*). I went off my diet and ate fish.

JACKSON (*joining in the laughter*). You're funny, my lord. (*In surprise.*) But that makes a whole month since you had fish, doesn't it?

BYRON. A little more than a month.

JACKSON (*as if giving permission*). You can surely have some again to-day.

BYRON. Thanks, Jackson, I've just been starving to death. I've been eating nothing but biscuits and soda water ever since. And when I couldn't get those, I've had potatoes and vinegar.

JACKSON. Good! Don't forget your Turkish bath to-morrow, my lord. And your physic this evenin'. And another thing. Which are you chewin' these days—gum or tobacco? Remember, this is very important. No matter how hungry you get, chew all you want, but don't eat, if you want to keep your looks.

BYRON (*pleading*). But I suffer such excruciating pangs of hunger.

JACKSON (*severely*). Do you, or don't you, want to stay thin?

BYRON (*cowed*). You're right. I've been chewing both—the gum when I go about among my friends, tobacco when I'm at home.

JACKSON. Well, anyway, you haven't had to come to

chewin' opium yet, like all the swells are doin'. That's a consolation. (*Changing his tone.*) My lord, you were speakin' of your poem a minute ago. Now, my lord, it isn't for me to express an opinion.

BYRON (*interested*). Don't be afraid. Go ahead.

JACKSON. Well, it's this way, my lord. Poetry's not for the likes of you. You're a peer of England. And you've got a seat in the House of Lords. And you can make fine speeches; and, bein' a Whig, you can say a good word or two, now and then, for Parliamentary reform and for alleviatin' the economic distress in the agricultural and manufacturing districts, and for other progressive measures, and to confound those damn Tories.

BYRON (*irritably*). I agree with you about the Tories.

JACKSON. This writin' of poetry—that's for commoners. You want to be a man of action.

BYRON (*amused*). Then you don't think much of poets?

JACKSON. Words, words, words. We men of muscle believe in doin' things. There was Samson. He pulled down a whole temple by pushin' at the pillars. Words can't pull down temples.

BYRON. No? I'm not so sure. But really, Jackson, I've been thinking lately of giving up my writing.

JACKSON (*extremely pleased*). Then you could really amount to something.

(*A knocking at the door.*)

BYRON. Yes? Come in, Fletcher.

(*FLETCHER is an honest, heavy, and devoted servant who has been valet and bodyguard to LORD BYRON since the latter was a boy.*)

FLETCHER (*entering*). My lord, a lady wanting to see you.

BYRON. A lady? What's her name?

FLETCHER. She wouldn't give her name.

JACKSON (*bowing himself out*). Well, under the circumstances, I'll be off. Till Wednesday, my lord. Good afternoon, my lord.

(*Exit JACKSON.*)

BYRON. Good afternoon, Jackson. (*To FLETCHER.*)
Fletcher, send the lady up.

(*Exit FLETCHER.*)

(*Shortly enter LADY CAROLINE, a beautiful picture in a long cape and a gorgeous hat.*)

BYRON (*delighted*). Caroline! How thrilling! Why didn't you send in your name?

(*LADY CAROLINE, without answering, suddenly seems to falter, to tremble, then throws her arms toward BYRON as if needing support. BYRON saves her from falling.*)

BYRON (*excitedly*). Caroline! Caroline! What's the matter?

LADY CAROLINE (*weakly*). I must have become a little faint.

BYRON. You poor child. Lean on me, and I'll help you to lie down.

LADY CAROLINE. Thank you, Byron.

BYRON (*consoling her*). You'll be all right. It's nothing at all.

(*He leads LADY CAROLINE gently into the inner room and shortly comes out, looking much perplexed. A few moments later, there emerges from the inner room LADY CAROLINE, a lovely picture, her slight and slender figure dressed in a page's costume. She carries her cape on one arm saucily, while in the other she carries her hat. She appears vastly amused at BYRON's amazement.*)

BYRON. Caro! good God!

LADY CAROLINE. This is a surprising adventure, isn't it?
(*Laying down the cape and hat.*)

BYRON. What madness is this?

LADY CAROLINE (*winningly*). I just had a sudden desire to be with you, and you know desire with me is fulfillment.

(*Nestles closely to BYRON.*)

BYRON. But your dress? Or rather lack of it?

LADY CAROLINE. It's a page's costume. I thought you'd just love to see me in it.

BYRON. And your fainting?

LADY CAROLINE. That was so I could get my cape off in there—to be more modest.

BYRON. Who is mad—bad—and dangerous to know now?

LADY CAROLINE (*excusing herself*). Oh, Byron, I just couldn't wait till you came to Melbourne House to see me. Then I got an idea. You know how slight my figure is, so I decided all at once I'd borrow one of my page's costumes, and wear it under my cape to avert suspicion. (*Vainly.*) Am I not fetching?

BYRON (*admiringly*). You've fetched Venus from Olympus.

LADY CAROLINE. No, I feel I'm too small for Venus. I'm more like Psyche.

BYRON. *Like Psyche?* You are Psyche.

LADY CAROLINE. Embrace me.

BYRON (*surprised*). Now, Caroline, really—

LADY CAROLINE (*piqued*). Well, Madame de Staël has been embracing me very often of late, and she seems to like it very much.

BYRON. When a woman embraces a woman, it's only a dress rehearsal.

LADY CAROLINE (*seizing her opportunity*). Then let's have the performance. Embrace me.

BYRON (*weakening*). You fascinating sylph— (*A sudden access of virtue.*) Now, really, Caro—

LADY CAROLINE. Oh, Byron, when are we going to put an end to this play acting? When will real life begin for us?

BYRON. What do you mean by real life?

LADY CAROLINE. Oh, Byron, I had to come. Lady Melbourne has been talking so much about us lately, I almost expected to find her here with you.

BYRON (*surprised*). Lady Melbourne talking! That's bad! We must bring no trouble on that sweet old lady's head, for I've become very fond of her.

LADY CAROLINE (*suddenly*). Oh, fly with me, Byron.

BYRON (*as if not believing his ears*). What! Fly!

LADY CAROLINE. Yes, to France, Italy, anywhere.

BYRON. That would be fine—if it were possible.

LADY CAROLINE. Fly with me!

BYRON. Control yourself, my dear.

LADY CAROLINE. You must run away with me, Byron.

BYRON. Run away indeed! And your husband?

LADY CAROLINE. We've lived lives apart. He is very indifferent to me.

BYRON. And you to him?

LADY CAROLINE. Yes. He bores me. He is always in Parliament and never thinks of anything else.

BYRON. Perhaps he bores Parliament too. Then you're even.

LADY CAROLINE (*laughing in spite of herself*). I'm sure he does, but—

BYRON. But he's very kind; every one says so.

LADY CAROLINE (*pleadingly*). I want to be loved, Byron. I never have been. I was only twenty when I married William. But from the hour I read "Childe Harold," I determined to make you my lover. You are the one love of my life.

BYRON. You're sure of that, Caro?

LADY CAROLINE. Why shouldn't I be sure? I'm old enough to know my own mind.

BYRON (*humorously*). Speaking of age, you know you're older than I am, Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE (*amused*). Oh, Byron, have you been asking questions about me?

BYRON. No, but you said the first time we met that you had been married seven years, and just now you said you were twenty when you married. That makes twenty-seven, and I'm only twenty-four.

LADY CAROLINE. Well, what if I am? (*Accusingly*.) I'm younger in love—from what people say about you.

BYRON. Very much so, Caro. Guess the first time I was in love.

LADY CAROLINE. There wasn't any first time for you, was there?

BYRON (*laughing*). Oh, yes, there was. I was in love

for the first time when I wasn't eight years old— (*Looking off in space.*) With little Mary Duff.

LADY CAROLINE. Nonsense. That was only childish fancy.

BYRON. No, it was with my whole being. For, one day when I was sixteen, my mother called to me and said, "Oh, Byron, what do you think? I have had a letter from Edinburgh, and your old sweetheart, Mary Duff, is married." I was nearly thrown into convulsions and frightened my mother terribly. I can see Mary's little face before me now. That's the way it's always been. Every woman I've loved, I've loved to desperation.

LADY CAROLINE (*cooingly*). Love me to desperation.

BYRON (*admiringly*). You irresistible sprite. It's so hard to refuse you anything.

LADY CAROLINE (*coaxingly*). Love me.

BYRON. It would be desperation, if I did.

LADY CAROLINE. Why?

BYRON. It would be desperation for both of us.

LADY CAROLINE. Why? Am I not a page worthy to be written into your life?

BYRON (*looking at her costume*). As pages go, you're a page worthy of being written into any man's life. You're a whole encyclopedia.

LADY CAROLINE. I hunger so for you.

BYRON. But Lady Melbourne? For her sake I must do what is right.

LADY CAROLINE. Oh, she'll never know.

BYRON. But you said you almost expected to find her here with me.

LADY CAROLINE. Well, she's been carrying on so, I really thought she might be. Only this morning she was watching me like a cat.

BYRON. Suppose she does come. How can I look her in the face?

LADY CAROLINE (*amorously*). Look in my face, Byron. I love you.

BYRON (*tenderly*). What a little thing you are.

LADY CAROLINE. But I mean more than a little to you, don't I?

BYRON. You mean a great deal to me, Caro. (*Beginning to waver.*) You mean—everything!

(*Embraces her passionately.*)

(*A knocking at the door.*)

BYRON. Don't come in! What is it, Fletcher?

FLETCHER (*outside*). Lady Melbourne to see you, my lord.

BYRON (*whispering*). Lady Melbourne! Just what I thought! Caro, quick! What are we to do? (*Aloud to FLETCHER.*) Bring her up—slowly. (*To LADY CAROLINE.*) Where can you go? This is terrible.

LADY CAROLINE. I don't want to go away at all. I'll stay right in there.

(*Pointing to inner room.*)

BYRON. You mad woman! Have it your own way.

(*Gives her her hat and cape, and pushes her into the bedroom and shuts the bedroom door. He then goes to the other door and opens it wide, as LADY MELBOURNE is about to enter. Meantime LADY CAROLINE has reopened the bedroom door a little, in order to listen.*)

BYRON (*welcoming her joyfully*). Lady Melbourne!

LADY MELBOURNE (*brightly*). Good afternoon, Lord Byron. What a charmingly outlandish place you have here.

BYRON. What a compliment you are paying me! I am breathless.

LADY MELBOURNE (*humorously*). I've come to talk about the weather.

BYRON. I'm sure only so important a subject would have brought you to my rooms for the first time.

LADY MELBOURNE. And also—to talk about something else.

BYRON. Now the weather waxes warm.

LADY MELBOURNE. Hot, Lord Byron, sizzingly hot. It's about Caroline—and you.

BYRON. That's truly equatorial heat.

LADY MELBOURNE. We've got to cross that equator.

BYRON. Then sit here, dear Lady Melbourne, and you'll be sitting right on it.

LADY MELBOURNE. Something must be done about that girl. She's getting wilder every day. For I've had a good chance to observe her, because she and William are living with me now at Melbourne House—(*smiling*)—as you doubtless know from your daily visits.

BYRON. Oh, don't worry about her.

LADY MELBOURNE. But I'm worried to death about her. She was acting very queerly this morning, and I'm suspecting her of some devilry. That's why I'm here.

BYRON. Oh, nonsense.

LADY MELBOURNE. But I can't help it. She's absolutely daft about you. (*Looking at BYRON keenly, as she sniffs the air.*) Frankly, Lord Byron, are you helping me or hindering me? I thought I sniffed a familiar perfume.

BYRON (*earnestly, sparring for time*). You know, Lady Melbourne, you're the best friend I have in the world. I only wish my mother had been cast in your image.

LADY MELBOURNE (*evidently satisfied that BYRON is hiding nothing from her*). Lord Byron, you must somehow help me to put an end to this affair. I appeal to your honor as a gentleman.

BYRON (*seriously*). What can I do?

LADY MELBOURNE. Aren't you tired of gadding about and leading such a hectic life?

BYRON. I'm worn out by it and constantly irritated and miserable.

LADY MELBOURNE. Then you must get married.

BYRON (*laughing*). The matchmaker again.

LADY MELBOURNE. Otherwise, you'll only be the prey of women and of your own caprices. I'm too fond of you to see you go to waste. I have been thinking this over for some weeks now—(*brightly*)—you remember since our first meeting.

BYRON. Yes, I remember you tried to talk me into marriage even then.

LADY MELBOURNE. Do you remember my introducing you to Miss Milbanke? She's my brother Ralph's child, Annabel Milbanke.

BYRON. A quiet girl, I recollect. Perhaps a little cold.

LADY MELBOURNE. Not really cold. Just nice English. She's the girl for you.

BYRON (*amused*). Miss Milbanke?

LADY MELBOURNE. She's just made for you. Writes verse, avoids the whirl of fashionable life, is sensible, is calm, worships her father and mother, and is religious. She'll keep you safe in harbor.

BYRON (*protesting*). But, Lady Melbourne, I can't afford to marry, as I told you when I first met you. My income from Newstead Abbey is less than my current expenses. And I'm still worried with debts incurred for my Continental tour.

LADY MELBOURNE. Nonsense, Lord Byron. You could sell Newstead for a hundred thousand pounds, if you wished, and more too. Plenty of people would be glad to own such an ancestral monument. Then you would have five thousand pounds a year income. And your Rochdale property as a little extra. You have plenty, plenty, Lord Byron.

BYRON. Sell Newstead!

LADY MELBOURNE. Why not? Now that your brain has made you famous, you don't need the estate to make you merely conspicuous. (BYRON *seems shocked, yet partly convinced.*) For your own sake as the greatest English poet living, marry Annabel, and then you will be safe from the machinations of those miserable married women who pursue you day in and day out for reasons unnecessary to inquire into.

BYRON. You really think I can afford to marry?

LADY MELBOURNE. Of course you can. And then don't forget. Though Annabel is no heiress, yet she has expectations.

BYRON (*humorously*). Then hadn't you better ask my future wife if she's willing to marry me?

LADY MELBOURNE (*laughing*). What woman would re-

fuse marriage to a peer of England, the handsomest poet in London, the author of "Childe Harold"—yes, the wicked poet Byron—whose wickedness acts as a magnet to all?

BYRON. Yes, I am rather wicked. But I take no pride in being so. (*Looking toward the rear room.*) To prove to you that, I think I'd better tell you something.

LADY CAROLINE (*rushing into the room in a rage*). So it's my country cousin Annabel!

LADY MELBOURNE (*starting violently*). Lady Caroline!

LADY CAROLINE (*bursting into mocking laughter*). My country mouse of a cousin!

LADY MELBOURNE. Your costume! (*Reproachfully to BYRON.*) And I thought I could trust you.

BYRON. So you can, Lady Melbourne. Let me explain.

LADY CAROLINE. I'll tell her. I'm not afraid. I came here in disguise just for a lark. Now why did *you* come?

LADY MELBOURNE. To save Lord Byron from you, but evidently he doesn't want to be saved.

LADY CAROLINE. Did you come here to talk about me?

LADY MELBOURNE. What else?

LADY CAROLINE. Then I'll stay a while, if you don't mind.

LADY MELBOURNE. Really, Caroline, it might be a very good idea. (*Accusingly to BYRON.*) Lord Byron, this is outrageous. Should you mind leaving us alone for a minute?

BYRON. If you wish it, of course. But I'll explain everything to you later, Lady Melbourne.

(*Exit to inner room.*)

LADY MELBOURNE. Caroline, are you still pursuing Lord Byron? Do you want to drive me to my grave? (*Pleading.*) Remember, I'm an old woman of nearly sixty-two years.

LADY CAROLINE. I have the right to my happiness. (*Impetuously.*) I love Lord Byron.

LADY MELBOURNE. So do I. If you really love him, can't you let him alone?

LADY CAROLINE. I don't see how that follows.

LADY MELBOURNE (*pathetically*). Don't say that. You don't love your husband—my son William—any more?

LADY CAROLINE (*scornfully*). William! You know I haven't loved him for years. He was handsome and accomplished when we married, but it didn't take long before we drifted as far apart as we decently could without causing scandal.

LADY MELBOURNE (*solemnly*). Don't you know the seventh commandment?

LADY CAROLINE (*lightly*). In my case, it's Thou shalt not bother.

LADY MELBOURNE. Impudent woman. And your child—my sweet grandchild—is he nothing to you?

LADY CAROLINE. Love is everything.

LADY MELBOURNE. And love for children isn't love?

LADY CAROLINE. Yes, but it's not the same thing. (*Suddenly.*) Your life with your husband isn't any too happy. Then you ought to know what I mean.

LADY MELBOURNE (*with rising tears*). Why remind me? But that makes me love my children all the more. (*With an accession of anger.*) I'll not have you blast my son's career. Do you understand? He is born to be a Prime Minister some day, and some day he shall be it. Do you hear?

(*Bursts into violent sobs.*)

LADY CAROLINE (*alarmed, calling out*). Byron, Byron, Lord Byron!

BYRON (*hastily reëntering*). Oh, Lady Melbourne!

(*Rushes to her and tries to soothe her, as she murmurs,*

"My son—scandal—ruin his future, o—o—oh!")

LADY CAROLINE (*agitated*). Lady Melbourne, Lady Melbourne, calm yourself, do be calm!

LADY MELBOURNE. Go away, you heartless woman.

LADY CAROLINE (*surprised, to BYRON*). She calls me heartless—me!

BYRON (*as if suddenly struck with the thought*). Can it be that you are?

LADY CAROLINE (*pleading*). Byron, you're not going to marry Annabel, you know you're not! Oh, say you're not going to!

LORD BYRON

BYRON (*lost in thought*). I wonder if you really are heartless.

LADY CAROLINE (*passionately*). Byron, Byron, you know better than to ask me that! It's my whole being I adore you with! I can't think of any one but you at all times!

BYRON. But that's just it. You must try to think of Lady Melbourne. Please go home, Caro, and quiet yourself. You'll see things much more clearly to-morrow.

LADY CAROLINE (*to BYRON, peremptorily*). Call a carriage!

LADY MELBOURNE. My carriage is here. Come home with me.

LADY CAROLINE. I won't use it!

BYRON (*exiting*). Very well, I'll tell Fletcher to get you one.

LADY CAROLINE (*to LADY MELBOURNE*). We'll see about your darling Annabel!

(BYRON *returns*.)

BYRON. Listen to reason, Caro.

LADY CAROLINE (*proudly*). My mother learned diplomacy from statesmen. My aunt was the Duchess of Devonshire. So I think I'll know how to manage.

(*Exit.*)

LADY MELBOURNE (*weakly*). Take me home, Lord Byron. Promise you'll be loyal to me, promise.

BYRON. I promise.

LADY MELBOURNE (*gratefully*). I trust you. Oh, my poor head. It's been such a terrible day.

BYRON. I'm sorry, Lady Melbourne. (*Gives her his arm.*) I promise to avoid Lady Caroline—(*hesitatingly*)—that is, if she'll only stop pestering me.

(*They go toward the door.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE THREE

TIME: *More than a year later. A summer evening.*

PLACE: *Same as Scene One.*

[*A party and supper. No dancing.*

As the curtain rises, LADY MELBOURNE with a knowing smile is surrendering ANNABEL to BYRON in the palm-shaded recess.]

LADY MELBOURNE. I shan't molest you two for some time.

(Exit into rear room.)

(During the following scene between BYRON and ANNABEL, people from the rear rooms filter in and out of the drawing-room.)

BYRON (*to ANNABEL*). That last letter you wrote me was delicious, Bell.

ANNABEL. And yours was wonderful, Lord Byron.

BYRON. Wonderful? Not very, if it couldn't win you. Why did you refuse me more than a year ago, when Lady Melbourne spoke to you for me?

ANNABEL. I wasn't sure of myself—or of you; and because I wasn't sure of you, I wasn't sure of myself.

BYRON (*feeling his way*). Did my past frighten you?

ANNABEL. N-n-o, though I do know how noble the private life of a young nobleman is supposed to be while at college or in London.

BYRON. I was free of authority, and I got into the worst crowd in London.

ANNABEL. I guessed as much.

BYRON. Then what was your reason?

ANNABEL (*delicately*). I thought you had been perhaps—well, indiscreet with Cousin Caroline.

BYRON. That infatuation is over.

ANNABEL. I think perhaps there were a number of reasons all together. For instance, I didn't like your remarks on religion in "Childe Harold" about one religion following another, and eventually all religions being forgotten, and God being totally indifferent to his children. You mustn't destroy what it has taken so long to build.

BYRON. I don't mean to destroy, Bell.

(*She looks at him incredulously.*)

BYRON. Really I don't. I am as certain of a divine first cause as I am that the magnetic needle turns to the pole, but, when I was a mere child, my Scotch nurse jammed my mind so full of dark Calvinistic thoughts that I used to scream in the night at the thought of hell fire and bottomless pits. This training has turned me against all dogma, but I'm not an atheist.

ANNABEL. Oh, now I understand. And I'm so glad. But there's another thing: at times you seem so gay, but yet I know you're not content.

BYRON (*scowling*). I'm often melancholy.

ANNABEL. But why?

BYRON. I don't know. It may be my indigestion. It may be my feet. Just think. All my life I haven't been able to really walk, to enjoy tramping, to climb mountains, but have had to stand by and watch others be happy. And maybe it's also poetic frenzy.

ANNABEL. Yes, but I write poetry. And I'm not that way.

BYRON (*brightly*). When you're more melancholy, your poetry will be better.

ANNABEL (*quickly*). No, when my poetry is better I'll be less melancholy.

BYRON (*laughing*). You're a wit, Bell.

ANNABEL (*pleased*). Do you know some one said to me the other day that my verse reminded her of yours?

BYRON. Really?

ANNABEL. But, frankly, I discouraged the comparison. (*Innocently.*) I do think my best verses just miss being as good as your worst ones.

BYRON. You know, Bell, you're very gracious to say that.

ANNABEL. I should like, above all things, to talk to you seriously about poetry, so I could learn to write better.

BYRON. What a charming pupil I should then have.

ANNABEL. But I no sooner get into a tête-à-tête with you than along come affected, adoring women—women who just overwhelm you with admiration.

BYRON. That's why I like you so much. You're so different from all the other women. You never pay me compliments.

ANNABEL (*excusing herself*). You hardly need any from me.

BYRON (*cagerly*). I'd give much to get one. (ANNABEL *hesitates, laughing*.) You see—I was right.

ANNABEL. I'll be perfectly frank with you, Lord Byron. When Aunt Elizabeth first broached—(*reddening a bit*)—a certain subject to me, I confess I was irritated to think another was trying to arrange my life for me. It seemed so indelicate and hurt my maiden's pride. Of course, I'm sure she meant it all for my good.

BYRON. As to that matter, you know that Caroline was bent on disgracing herself, and Lady Melbourne just had to take the matter into her own hands, instead of letting it have its natural growth.

ANNABEL. Poor Caroline. She looks so badly lately.

BYRON (*regretfully*). Yes, so I've heard. But she's such a willful, vain, capricious, weepy woman.

ANNABEL (*roguishly*). If she is all that, how is it you were so smitten with her?

BYRON. I was so flattered a year ago by the attentions of such a fashionable lady that I lost my head.

ANNABEL (*playfully*). Oh, that's another thing about you—you're always losing your head.

BYRON. I do seem to have a countless number of them, don't I?

ANNABEL. Yes. They grow faster than even the fabled hydra's.

BYRON. I'll tell you what, Bell. I'll try to collect my wits

a little and keep them all in one and the same head, and I won't lose that head for worlds, for it will be as precious to me as yours.

ANNABEL (*a little dryly*). Let us go and get some lemonade, before you say more than perhaps you mean.

BYRON (*childishly*). I prefers oranges, but never mind.

(*Laughing, they exeunt rear room.*)

(*At different points in the drawing-room, there are now little groups, in each of which some one holds forth.*)

FIRST GUEST (*speaking earnestly to his group*). There is a new theory of my colleague, Dr. Lushwell, that the breath of cows is excellent for human beings to inhale. The only problem seems to be whether to bring the patient to the cow or the cow to the patient. It's distinctly inconvenient to make a patient stay any length of time in the stalls of a barn, and if the cow is kept out on an open lot, the fresh air of the great outdoors is so abundant that it will tend to dilute the distinctive and very special medicinal quality of the cow's breath. It has been suggested that the cow be brought to the sickroom of the patient. But here, however, a difficulty was recently encountered in the landlord of a house, who objected to the presence of a cow on his realty. This interesting condition has created a problem which many medical brains will be needed to unriddle. Perhaps a long program to educate the landlord to his responsibilities to his tenants will be needed. But all who are truly interested in the progress of medical science need have no fear that the problem will be met somehow, and the cow will again prove to be, as she always has been in the past, a friend to man, woman, and child.

SECOND GUEST (*highly ludicrous and important, speaking in his group*). Why should a man prefer a young woman to an old woman? Just because it's natural doesn't make it right. There are many things in nature that aren't right. Take that scourge, Napoleon. Why was he born? And why doesn't he die, instead of hanging around in St. Helena? Take the heat to-night, when everybody wants to dance. Take the

English Channel. Why wasn't the Channel made wider so that France would be farther away and trouble us less? So it's clear, then, that if a thing is natural, that doesn't make it right. Then there's another reason. A young woman has worries: whom shall she marry? how much money shall she look for? shall she improve her mind, or just make face and figure pleasing? But an older woman doesn't have these worries. Either she's already been married, or she hasn't been. All her vital decisions have been already made. If she has married, her children have been born. If she hasn't married, her children have not been born. That is, unless, of course, she has natural children. But that's beside the point. (*Pettishly.*) These exceptions always come to mind just when you least expect them and insidiously try to spoil one's theory. But they won't upset me! Thirdly, an older woman has developed judgment. She has lost her vanity, she doesn't have to worry about the fashions, or how many lovers she can attract. Then it's clear, isn't it, why we men should prefer an old woman to a young woman? (*By this time those who were merely amused have left the speaker.*) Now why are there so many mistakes made in the world? Because men prefer young women. If they would only stop to consider. If they would only stop to realize that they live but once. If they would only think of the comfort with an older woman, when all the passions are quieted, and the voices are low, and the kisses are chaste. (*More guests leave him.*) If they only knew that love is divine, and therefore should come appropriately late in life, because we are then nearer our mortal end, which is the beginning of our divinity. (*The sole remaining listener leaves him.*) If only we could understand all these things, many sins would never be committed, many errors would never occur, many—I seem to be alone—well, never mind, a prophet never was honored in his own country.

(LADY CAROLINE, seemingly glorying in the flattery being paid her by some guests, is holding forth in her group. She looks very pale and worn to the bone. Her appearance is such that it arouses sympathy at

sight. As she speaks, she performs the different motions with the fan called for by her words.)

LADY CAROLINE (*holding up a lovely fan*). To him who is observant, the fan has a complete language of its own. For instance, touching the wedding ring—thus—means, “If ever I am free again, come to see me with the speed of young Lochinvar.” If I touch my thumb—thus—that means, “I’m very sorry I’m dancing with my stupid partner, but if you take a seat somewhere, I’ll arrange to close my present dance near you.” Now if I touch my little finger—thus—that means, “Are you the youngest son? If you are, there’s no hope for you. But I like the general lines of your figure, so please arrange to introduce to me your oldest brother, or whoever it is who will inherit the estate.” (*Beginning to titter.*) Now comes the exciting part. If I close the fan—thus—that means I am yours! This action is followed immediately by dropping the fan to the side—thus. This means, “Come to-morrow at four o’clock.” If the meeting is desired for a later hour, I raise the fan gracefully—thus—and I fan myself slowly as many times as there are hours to be added. Thus—three times means seven o’clock; six times—thus—thus—ten o’clock; nine times—thus—thus—thus—means one o’clock—

LADY MORGAN. One o’clock! In the morning!

(*General laughter.*)

LADY CAROLINE (*simpering*). I was just supposing, Lady Morgan. Now is this not very charming? And all this may be done with a little fan.

(*A general handclapping follows this announcement, with cries of, “How ingenious!” “Brilliant idea!”*

“Lady Caroline!” as the crowd filters into the rear rooms again.)

(LADY CAROLINE goes over to HOBHOUSE.)

LADY CAROLINE (*affecting a lisp*). Mr. Hobhouse, gueth how many pairs of thilck thockings I have on?

HOBHOUSE. Too many are as bad as too few.

LADY CAROLINE. Gueth.

HOBHOUSE. I prefer to restrain my imagination.

LADY CAROLINE. Then you give up?

HOBHOUSE. Yes, I give up.

LADY CAROLINE. Thicks.

HOBHOUSE. At this rate, Lady Caroline, you'll soon be a centipede.

(LADY CAROLINE *grins at HOBHOUSE, then, going over to MOORE, struggles with him to pull off his coat.*)

MOORE (*expostulating*). Lady Caroline, Lady Caroline, what's the matter with you?

LADY CAROLINE (*ceasing her foolishness*). You're such a little man. I want to see how really little you are.

MOORE. I'm bigger than a goldfinch.

LADY CAROLINE. And you sing just as sweetly.

MOORE (*laughing in spite of himself*). For that, I must forgive you.

(*At this point, BYRON and ANNABEL enter from rear room.*)

ANNABEL (*to BYRON*). I wonder what Beautiful Silliness has been up to now.

BYRON (*aghast*). How pale she looks.

(CAROLINE *looks at BYRON and ANNABEL intently, as if eager to know their exact relationship.*)

MOORE (*seeing BYRON*). Oh, Lord Byron, I would have a word with the fair Miss Milbanke.

(ANNABEL *smiles to BYRON and goes off with MOORE into rear room. HOBHOUSE walks over to BYRON.*)

BYRON. What brilliancy, Hobhouse, there is in a fashionable party!

HOBHOUSE. Are you jesting? That lowering brow of yours is so hard to read.

BYRON. We have done everything: told stories of ghosts, stories of actors. We have had a conjurer performing tricks. We have done everything except converse.

HOBHOUSE (*brightly*). Would you have people able to converse, too? (*Whimsically.*) What Utopian idea is this?

BYRON. Alas, our countrymen have discovered only that they are tired, not that they are tiresome.

HOBHOUSE. It is too much to hope the discovery of the

second will come very soon. (*Sensing that perhaps CAROLINE and BYRON wish to be alone.*) Excuse me, I'm off to quench my thirst.

(*Exit into rear room.*)

LADY CAROLINE (*to LORD BYRON, as they automatically walk off by themselves to the palm-shaded corner*). Once you saw me every day—for five months you saw me every day.

BYRON. Things change.

LADY CAROLINE. I hate you, Lord Byron.

BYRON (*shrugging his shoulders*). So I gathered from all the letters you've written me lately, threatening even my life.

LADY CAROLINE. I meant them all.

BYRON. To die, to be shot, what is it all to one habitually the slave of melancholy?

LADY CAROLINE (*softening*). Oh, Byron, why don't you run away with me?

BYRON. Must we go over that again? (*His tone becoming severe.*) I've a question to ask you, Caro. You've been up to one of your tricks again.

LADY CAROLINE (*innocently*). Tricks! What tricks? Really.

BYRON. Murray tells me that I wrote him a letter last January, asking him to return my portrait. This is only July, and my memory is perfectly clear on the subject. I have no recollection of having written such a letter. (*LADY CAROLINE looks startled. BYRON watches her narrowly.*) I never wrote him for that portrait. In any case, it is gone, for Murray sent it away in response to a request for it in my handwriting. (*LADY CAROLINE quails.*) How did the letter happen to be in my handwriting? (*LADY CAROLINE is silent.*) Do you know anything about it, Caro? (*LADY CAROLINE is silent.*) Do you? (*LADY CAROLINE hangs her head, professing her guilt by her appearance.*) So you wrote the letter.

LADY CAROLINE (*abashed*). I just had to have the portrait. It was such a perfect likeness of you.

BYRON. Forging my handwriting—through an entire letter—I must say you are clever, Lady Caroline. Clever—and disgusting.

(LADY CAROLINE *gradually develops irritation during the following scene.*)

LADY CAROLINE. Disgusting? Why should you complain? You have done nothing but stab me daily. For the last ten months, you've completely ignored me in your infatuation for Lady Oxford. (*Jealously.*) Who is Lady Oxford? She's over forty, if she's a day, and I'm barely thirty. And she's not so pretty at that.

BYRON. But you know she reads Lucretius in the original.

LADY CAROLINE (*bitingly*). Am I to understand that's how you and she spent your time together—all of it!

BYRON (*laughingly*). Well, no, not exactly all of it. But you know her marriage was a very serious mistake.

LADY CAROLINE. Is that why she had to console herself with you?

BYRON. Isn't that exactly what you have been trying to do with me?

LADY CAROLINE (*taken aback*). Well, my husband doesn't love me.

BYRON. Yes—in his way—he does.

LADY CAROLINE. In his way! (*Willfully.*) I want to be loved in my way.

BYRON. And as for Lady Oxford, you know very well she's gone abroad—to stay a long while. So you needn't trouble yourself about her any more.

LADY CAROLINE. Yes, and they say she walks about Naples with your picture on the front of her girdle.

BYRON (*his vanity tickled*). Really, I hadn't heard that.

LADY CAROLINE. Don't you miss her?

BYRON. Why, of course I miss her. There are few women who ever gained such an ascendancy over me as she did. It was all I could do once to keep myself from running away with her.

LADY CAROLINE (*angrily*). Yet, when I asked you to run

away with me, you talked to me, and soothed me, and finally told me to go home to think more clearly.

BYRON. Ye-es; that was last August, just eleven months ago. How clearly I remember it. It was the beginning of the end.

LADY CAROLINE. Why did you treat me so differently?

BYRON (*as if not hearing her*). When I am in love with a woman, there is no other woman in the world at the time.

LADY CAROLINE (*more softly*). Then were you in love with me—before last August?

BYRON. Yes, I loved you—I think.

LADY CAROLINE (*exasperated*). You think!

BYRON. You see you overwhelmed me so with attention from the very day “Childe Harold” was published. You know very well, before I came to London, I mingled only with provincial society here in England. So when a great lady like you stooped to me, she really stooped to conquer. But when I saw how people were talking about us, I felt it wouldn’t do.

LADY CAROLINE. You mean it annoyed Lady Melbourne! (*Jealously.*) Is that when she made overtures for you to Cousin Annabel?

BYRON. Must I answer that question?

LADY CAROLINE. Then you really didn’t love me even then?

BYRON. Yes, I did—I think.

LADY CAROLINE (*bitterly*). Then how, how could you have written me as you did last November?

BYRON. I don’t recall any special letter last November.

LADY CAROLINE (*her self-control going more and more rapidly*). And you’ve even forgotten! And you’ve even forgotten the letter that ate its way into my heart like a consuming acid. Here, here it is, burning me now.

(*She pulls from her bodice a letter.*)

BYRON (*admonishing her*). Control yourself.

LADY CAROLINE. This letter! With a coronet on the seal, and Lady Oxford’s initials! And you’ve forgotten it! (*Reading with gradually increasing fury.*) “Lady Caroline

Lamb—I am no longer your lover; and since you oblige me to confess it by this truly unfeminine persecution, learn that I am attached to another, whose name it would of course be dishonest to mention. I shall ever remember with gratitude the many instances I have received of the predilection you have shown in my favor. I shall ever continue your friend, if your ladyship will permit me so to style myself. And, as a first proof of my regard, I offer you this advice: correct your vanity, which is ridiculous; exert your absurd caprices on others; and leave me in peace. Your obedient servant, Byron."

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(By the end of the reading, LADY CAROLINE is like one possessed. Crying wildly, she darts away from BYRON, runs to a table, seizes a knife, and seemingly tries to stab herself. LADY MELBOURNE, who has happened to be near the table, confronts LADY CAROLINE.)

LADY MELBOURNE (*transfixing LADY CAROLINE with her glance*). I dare you to do it! I dare you! You haven't the courage!

(LADY CAROLINE slowly drops the knife. LADY MELBOURNE picks it up. A crowd has gathered around LADY CAROLINE, including BYRON, MOORE, and HOBHOUSE.)

LADY MELBOURNE (*answering excited queries of "What's happened?" "Who is it?" "What's the matter?" etc.*). Oh, she's rather frightened. Lady Caroline accidentally came near cutting herself. She's quite unnerved. I'm very sorry, but perhaps it would be just as well if the party broke up, so the house would be quiet for her. Annabel, take Caroline to her room. Lord Byron, you stay.

LADY MORGAN. I'd love to help.

LADY MELBOURNE. Thank you, dear Lady Morgan, you're so sweet. But you really can't do a thing.

(ANNABEL does as directed. As the guests leave the drawing-room, there are cries of, "Oh, we're so sorry," "Poor Lady Caroline," "Poor dear," "And she was so witty about the fan," "But did you notice how pale

she looked?" "It was such a lovely party—until now," "It wasn't nearly so hot as it was at Mrs. Darley's party," "Nor so crowded," "And the iced lemonade: wasn't it good!")

LADY MELBOURNE (*to* BYRON). Again Caro has barely escaped bringing scandal on us all.

BYRON (*agitated*). Isn't there something we can do for her? There must be some way to prevent the recurrence of such scenes.

LADY MELBOURNE. *We* do for her? You mean you and I? No. But what can *you* do for her? That is what you should ask yourself. Lord Byron, the final moment has come. You must see Annabel, and ask her again to marry you. Once you and she are married, that little silly—Caro—can see you as much as she likes, and there'll be no scandal attached, for you'll be marrying into her family and into my family, and we'll all be as one.

BYRON. Oh, what's the use? She won't have me.

LADY MELBOURNE. Never mind. You still love her, don't you?

BYRON. More than ever. We've been writing every few days of late.

LADY MELBOURNE. Good. That's auspicious. And she still likes your poetry?

BYRON (*smiling*). More than ever—so she says.

LADY MELBOURNE. Your last long poem is really very beautiful, Lord Byron. Your reputation has gained by it. (*Quoting.*)

Yes, Love indeed is light from heaven;
A spark of that immortal fire
With angels shared, by Alla given,
To lift from earth our low desire.

(*Smiling.*) You just say all that to Annabel, and continue in the same strain, and I don't think you'll have any trouble.

(*Reënter* ANNABEL.)

ANNABEL. Poor Caroline! She looks like a corpse.

LADY MELBOURNE. Annabel, darling Annabel, we must

put a stop to these terrible scenes. Aren't you moved? Doesn't your heart just bleed?

ANNABEL. What can be done?

LADY MELBOURNE (*gently*). I must be direct, Annabel. Come here. Look at me. Haven't you yet learned to love Lord Byron?

(ANNABEL, *startled, looks at her, and then at BYRON.*)

ANNABEL. Why, Aunt Elizabeth!

(*She lowers her eyes in blushing confusion.*)

BYRON (*going to her*). My dear.

ANNABEL (*with sweet surrender*). We shouldn't have been apart as long as we have been. Then all this trouble about Caro wouldn't have happened.

BYRON (*admiringly*). Your cheeks feel so round I'm going to call you Pippin. My sister Augusta will be so happy!

LADY MELBOURNE (*overjoyed*). Lovely! What did I tell you, Lord Byron. My sweetest children.

(*Kisses them heartily.*)

ANNABEL (*to BYRON*). I'll be so happy to have a sister, because I'm an only child, and I know I'll just love Augusta.

BYRON (*gladly*). Darling Bell, why didn't you say yes a year ago? (*Suddenly gloomy.*) Then I should have been saved much misery—(*shamefacedly*)—and sinfulness.

LADY MELBOURNE (*unable to restrain her exuberance*). My dears! My darlings!

ANNABEL (*sweetly*). I'm sorry, Byron. That will be all over now.

BYRON (*happily, to LADY MELBOURNE*). But, Lady Melbourne—my doer of the impossible—my fairy godmother—my second mother I should love to call you if my first hadn't been—(*his voice humorously faltering*)—well, what you all know. My income and my debts are like parallel lines. (*Humorously to ANNABEL.*) You're reputed very clever in mathematics, Bell. Tell me—now this is a hard one—why are my income and my debts like two parallel lines?

ANNABEL. Do you wish me to say, "Because they never meet"?

LORD BYRON

BYRON (*entranced*). You Princess of Parallelograms!

LADY MELBOURNE. My mathematicians! One and one make one is all either of you need know about mathematics. My poet! My—God bless you both! To-morrow we'll tell Caro, and then the world! How London will thrill! (*Embracing them both, as she weeps tears of happiness. Apologetically.*) I'm an old lady, and I can't stop crying. Oh, my darlings, please try to be happy—try ever so hard—I never was happy, but I mustn't think of that—oh, don't let anything come between you, just—just make up your minds to be happy and you've just got to be happy.

ANNABEL (*affectionately putting her arms around* LADY MELBOURNE). My precious Aunt Elizabeth! If I'm not happy, it will be my own fault.

BYRON (*looking very sober, and as if lost in thought*). Marriage. (*Spelling the word on his fingers.*) M-a-r-r-i-a-g-e, eight letters. Love. L-o-v-e, four letters. Marriage is twice as long as love. Take notice, Byron, you have a task on your hands.

LADY MELBOURNE (*to* BYRON). What's the matter, dear?

BYRON. Oh, I was just thinking.

LADY MELBOURNE (*reprovingly*). Thinking! When there's a lovely girl beside you, Lord Byron, it's time for action.

(BYRON, *accepting the reproof gayly, takes the happy ANNABEL in his arms.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE FOUR

TIME: *Early winter of the following year. Afternoon.*

PLACE: *BYRON'S rented house, Piccadilly Terrace. The library. On the sides, little alcoves for study, snugly fitted up. Door. Windows.*

[A table with glasses and decanter looks as if there had been drinking for some time.]

As the curtain rises, BYRON, HOBHOUSE, and MOORE are discovered.

Throughout the following scene, they drink brandy at frequent intervals, and smoke cigars.

A BAILIFF is present, seemingly guarding the books.]

BYRON (*irritably*). But, Hobhouse, it's getting worse and worse. I never thought it would cost so much more to live double than single. And Bell and I go out so little, too, on account of her condition.

HOBHOUSE (*amused*). Two can live as cheaply as one—if each one satisfies but half his wants.

(MOORE and BYRON *laugh*.)

BYRON. But the creditors? They all seem to have got the idea because I made a marriage settlement of sixty thousand pounds on Bell, that my security for my past loans has thereby become distinctly inferior. And how they swoop down upon me! Duns come every day. Angry tradesmen are always at the door, and hardly a day goes by but what one of them steps inside to fill the air with lamentations. And—(*pointing to the BAILIFF*)—this bailiff is, as you see, perfectly at home. He's seized my books now. And I've been saved from prison only by the privileges of my rank. (*Worried*.) If only I could sell Newstead! I've been trying to sell it ever since my marriage.

MOORE. Tell me, as I've been in Ireland almost a year, what are the prospects of selling it?

BYRON (*worrying*). Tom, I may hear about it even to-day.

HOBHOUSE. I'm sure you'll sell it. Then you'll have plenty of cash, with which to pay off your debts: and you'll be able to live on the income. After all, you are a man of property, don't forget. And your pen must be bringing you in a fortune.

BYRON. Oh, yes, it does, but you know I give away that money. No English nobleman has ever made writing his livelihood.

HOBHOUSE (*smiling*). It seems as if you are almost being punished for being a nobleman.

BYRON (*with a painful laugh*). Yes, noblesse oblige.

MOORE (*merrily*). For the first, and probably last time in my life, I'm glad I'm not a nobleman.

BYRON (*still worried, to HOBHOUSE*). And another thing. Bell is up in the air about my going abroad with you.

HOBHOUSE. Are you sure you have handled the situation as delicately as possible?

BYRON (*dubiously*). Well, I might perhaps have lost my temper a bit. But the idea! I invited her to come along. But no! She wants to stay near her father and mother. Did you ever!

MOORE. But, Byron, don't you think she's thinking also of the child that's coming? Perhaps she prefers an English nursery to a foreign one.

BYRON. That's all well and good, Tom. But she says if I can find life abroad enjoyable without her, that means I never loved her.

HOBHOUSE. What dear, strange creatures women are!

BYRON. They are both the reward and the punishment for our being born.

MOORE (*exploding a bomb*). Well, gentlemen, I'd never go abroad, if my Bessie asked me not to.

HOBHOUSE (*with humorous scorn*). Sentimentalist! You

and your Bessie! Take care, Tom—a young married man like you—or you'll be henpecked.

BYRON (*improvising*).

Tom, Tom, the piper's son,
Prefers domestic to foreign fun.
So, after singing for ladies at all the routs,
He kisses his Bessie in many bouts.

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(*Laughter.*)

MOORE (*his eye noting the BAILIFF and twinkling*). My good man, you may have a drink, if you promise to go home.

BAILIFF (*shaking his head and speaking in broad Scotch*). I canna gae hame, but I can drink.

HOBHOUSE. He's a bonny Scot. That ought to interest you, Byron.

BYRON. Are you perhaps from Aberdeen?

BAILIFF. I lived there a while, my lord.

BYRON. Fine! I had some of the happiest days of my boyhood in Aberdeen. Hobhouse, pour him out a drink. He lived in Aberdeen.

HOBHOUSE. Here you are, my man.

BYRON (*with humorous pleading, to BAILIFF*). Suppose you had a home. Should you want a bailiff sitting in it all the time?

BAILIFF. 'Tis my sittin' here, my lord, that keeps my weans a-sittin' in their own wee nests.

BYRON (*smiling*). Oh, you're a family man. (*Curious.*) Now tell me. And what made you get married, my good friend?

BAILIFF. I dinna exactly ken. But it was just a feelin' I had that I wanted to get married.

BYRON. But can't you describe the feeling more in detail? Tell me.

BAILIFF. Aye, your lordship, perfectly. 'Twas this way. 'Twas just a feelin' I had that I wanted to get married.

BYRON. Oh! (*To MOORE and HOBHOUSE*.) He has made an infinitely complex thing very simple—which is more than I can or could do. (*To BAILIFF*.) Thanks, my good

man, you have taught me muckle. You may go now and watch the backs of my books.

BAILIFF. My lord, if it isn't presumin', I wonder could I ask ye a question, as ane wha kens sae much? It's about the law.

BYRON (*pointing to HOBHOUSE*). There's the man for you. He's headed straight for the woolsack.

BAILIFF (*to HOBHOUSE*). Please, sir, if I take down ane o' yon books to read it, wad I be breakin' my trust to watch the books? For ance I begin to read, I'd be takin' my een off watchin' them?

MOORE (*to BYRON and HOBHOUSE*). He hasn't a mind: he has merely a sense of direction.

HOBHOUSE. My man, you have reached a point in the sliding scale of human intellect beyond all possibility of mortal help, save one—from nature's granary. Let me play Bacchus to your Bailiff.

(*Pours the BAILIFF out another drink, amid general laughter. The BAILIFF clownishly drinks it down with much smirking.*)

BYRON (*to BAILIFF*). Now go downstairs and Fletcher will give you dinner.

(*Exit BAILIFF.*)

MOORE. Well, we must be going, Byron. We've had a perfectly fine time.

HOBHOUSE. Cheer up, Byron. Don't look so glum. After all, you have something to be thankful for.

BYRON. What's that?

HOBHOUSE. God made you an Englishman.

(*Exeunt HOBHOUSE and MOORE, laughing hilariously, as BYRON darts furious glances after them.*)

(*Shortly enter ANNABEL.*)

ANNABEL (*sweetly*). I heard them go. Am I in the way, Duck?

BYRON (*violently*). Damnably!

ANNABEL (*taken aback*). Oh, Duck! (*Recovering herself.*) I've bad news, Duck.

BYRON (*same tone as before*). Newstead, I wager.

ANNABEL (*disappointed*). Yes, I heard indirectly. I suppose you'll hear to-day from your lawyer. The negotiations for the sale have fallen through. Oh, I am so sorry.

BYRON (*angrily*). As I expected.

ANNABEL (*tone of surprise*). I'm sure everybody believed Newstead would be sold. And mother will be so disappointed.

BYRON (*suspiciously*). Mother! Yes, that's it, it's your mother, Lady Milbanke! Now Lady Noel, if you please. She it is who has been so insistent on my selling Newstead. Ever since April, when she came into her brother's fortune and title of Lady Noel, she has acted as if she considered me a beggar, without a penny to my name.

ANNABEL. Oh, Duck, how can you say such things!

BYRON (*suddenly seeming to be in great pain*). Oh, Pippin, my indigestion again!

ANNABEL. Then why do you keep drinking brandy? (*Trying to comfort him.*) Dearest Duck, you mustn't excite yourself. Just rest. Don't worry. I love you, Duck, in spite of—

BYRON (*irritably*). "In spite of"—there's always a sort of spite, so to speak, attached to your love.

ANNABEL (*terribly grieved*). Oh, Duck, how can you?

BYRON. It's so! It's always been that way! And I haven't any liver any more. And I'm always nearly starved to death. What's the use of living?

ANNABEL (*sympathetically*). Quiet yourself, please. You have everything to live for, you're such a great genius.

BYRON (*with an apologetic smile*). This cursed stomach of mine would upset anybody.

ANNABEL (*pleasantly but hesitatingly introducing the subject*). About your contemplated trip on the Continent—

BYRON (*sullenly*). That subject again!

ANNABEL. Excuse me, Duck, I thought I'd just like to make my feelings clear, so you'd really understand what I mean. How can you go away, and leave me with a little infant? Don't you know that there are still rumors of wars, and traveling is dangerous?

BYRON (*angrily*). I need the excitement of new scenes and new ideas to increase my mental powers.

ANNABEL. Can't you get new ideas in London?

BYRON (*bursting out in supercilious laughter*). Oh, Pip-pin, where is your sense of humor?

ANNABEL. You may be disdainful, but I don't see why you can't.

BYRON (*excitedly*). That's it. You don't see! You can't see! It's not in your nature to see! Besides, I want to be under a bluer sky! This climate kills me.

ANNABEL (*much disturbed*). Ever since we were married, you have grown increasingly restless. (BYRON *looks away from ANNABEL with aversion*.) I am talking to you, Duck. Won't you please look at me when I speak?

BYRON. I don't want to see your face.

ANNABEL (*as if stabbed, but trying to be brave*). Take, for instance, your habit of putting loaded pistols beside your bed on retiring.

BYRON (*still with eyes averted*). I've always been nervous and I've always done that.

ANNABEL. If you have, you have. But can it conduce to my sleeping well, especially when I am soon to become a mother, to see pistols the last thing before I go to bed? Can it, Byron? (BYRON *maintains a stony silence*.) Can it? (BYRON, *with face averted, still makes no answer*. ANNABEL *tries harder and harder to keep from going to pieces*.) Then there's that bottle of laudanum.

BYRON (*amazed*). What laudanum?

(ANNABEL *realizes something has slipped out that she hadn't meant to let slip out*.)

ANNABEL (*hesitating, in a low voice*). I may as well tell you. I opened a trunk of yours.

BYRON (*blazing out*). What!

ANNABEL. Yes, I did.

BYRON (*furiously*). How dared you!

ANNABEL. What did you want with a bottle of laudanum?

BYRON. It was for headaches!

ANNABEL. Then why did you hide it?

BYRON. I thought you might misinterpret it.

ANNABEL (*with gathering tears*). No, I didn't misinterpret it. I interpreted it. In a moment of madness, there is no telling what harm you might have done to yourself.

BYRON (*more and more furiously*). Then it was you who also forced open my desk and stole some letters!

ANNABEL. I didn't.

BYRON. What do you mean by "I didn't"?

ANNABEL (*slowly*). I—happen to know—who did.

BYRON. Was it done at your instigation?

ANNABEL. Ye-es.

BYRON. Oh!

ANNABEL. We—

BYRON. We! Who is "we"?

ANNABEL. Mrs. C. and I.

BYRON. Oh, your mother's servant and your confidante! That sneak!

ANNABEL. Don't be so disrespectful. She was my nurse and is here now because I need comfort and protection.

BYRON. I suppose you tell her everything.

ANNABEL (*continuing, as if she hadn't heard*). After we found the laudanum, we thought we'd better look further—for your protection.

BYRON (*with loud ironical laughter*). My protection! So, for my protection, you had to steal a package of letters written to me by a married woman, which were written before I married you?

ANNABEL. Then why did you keep them?

BYRON. Because I never really forget a woman. It's the poet in me.

ANNABEL (*satirically*). No, it's the man in you.

BYRON. In me the poet and the man are one.

ANNABEL. I think I did only my duty when I sent the letters to the lady's husband.

BYRON (*sarcastically*). That's undoubtedly why the husband paid me a duty call.

ANNABEL (*with gradually increasing firmness*). And while we're on the subject there's something else.

BYRON. Is there more? Really, there's no end to your bag of tricks.

ANNABEL. Yes, there is. It's that matter of the Drury Lane Theater. Why don't you give up your place on the Committee?

BYRON (*suspiciously*). You're not hinting that I've been—that there's been something to talk about with the actresses there, are you?

ANNABEL (*holding her own*). I'm hinting nothing. But people have a way of conveying impressions.

BYRON (*bursting out*). Then their impressions are damned lies. Oh, I committed a terrible folly in marrying you!

ANNABEL. So! It needed but this! (*With gathering fury.*) The other day, when you ordered me to walk into that inner room there—straight ahead—without glancing to right or left—you had such a look on your face that I thought you—almost meditated murder.

BYRON. Maybe I did! And I'll tell you something you never knew. After you had once refused my offer of marriage, I persisted in wooing you, only because I was resentful and thirsted for revenge. I never loved you—the slightest bit.

ANNABEL (*agonized*). Oh, Duck! I'd have left you long ago, if I hadn't thought there was some mental derangement which might excuse your behavior toward me.

BYRON (*thunderstruck*). Do I understand you to say you would have left me?

ANNABEL. Yes, if I were sure you were not crazy!—(*Bursting into tears.*) Look what we have come to!—(*With a last attempt at peace.*) Duck? Do you still want to go away and leave me—and the baby that's to be born?

BYRON (*firmly*). I've already made arrangements with Hobhouse to go in the spring.

ANNABEL (*nearly in a state of collapse*). Oh, you are the most unspeakably selfish of men!

BYRON. I have a right to live my own life.

ANNABEL (*with sudden determination*). But not to ruin mine (*emphasizing the words*), Lord Byron!

(*She rushes out of the door.*)

(BYRON, *suddenly seeming to be in the throes of an indescribably painful attack of indigestion, writhes in agony. Noisily he throws against the door chairs and other articles of furniture, thus barricading the door. Intermittently he hurls oaths and mutters to himself. Occasionally he lets out a yell. Soon a banging on the outside of the door is heard, with a feeble feminine voice calling excitedly, "Byron, Byron! It's Lady Melbourne! Lady Melbourne! Open the door!"*)

BYRON (*slowly coming to his senses and going to the door*). Who is it?

VOICE (LADY MELBOURNE). Byron! It's Lady Melbourne! Lady Melbourne! Let me in!

(BYRON *eagerly moves away the furniture from the door and finally lets LADY MELBOURNE in.*)

LADY MELBOURNE (*looking terribly excited*). Bell's gone! I was driving by as she was rushing out of the door! She's gone to her mother's! (*Seeing the disordered state of the furniture.*) What's this? She says she'll never live with you again. (*Weakening.*) It's over. It was all my doing. The marriage I arranged.

(*Bursts into tears.*)

BYRON (*weakly*). I'm so sick, Lady Melbourne. I don't know what you're saying. Please call Fletcher.

CURTAIN

SCENE FIVE

TIME: *Early the following spring. Late afternoon.*

PLACE: *Same as Scene Four.*

[*Enter AUGUSTA, the half sister of BYRON, four years older than he. She is attractive, with fine, very dark brown hair, verging on black, and shows every evidence of sweetness of disposition, of good cheer, and of affection.*]

AUGUSTA (*kissing BYRON warmly*). My poor brother! My poor Baby Byron! I just had to look in to see you, if it was only for a minute.

BYRON. Dearest Augusta, you were sweet to come. (*Shaking his head mournfully.*) You've no idea what a comfort you were to me those two months that you stayed with me after Bell had gone. I can never be grateful enough.

AUGUSTA. I'd have stayed longer, if it weren't for husband and the children.

BYRON. I know, dearest Goose, you are the best of sisters. But to think Bell could do a thing like that. It's incredible.

AUGUSTA (*sympathetically*). Perhaps she doesn't really mean to stick to her resolution.

BYRON. That's why I postponed my trip with Hobhouse, hoping she'd soften to me. But she has kept insisting that I sign an agreement of separation (*slowly*), and I have already promised to sign.

AUGUSTA (*amazed*). You have promised?

BYRON (*mournfully*). Yesterday. Now it's all over.

AUGUSTA. My poor brother.

BYRON. I'll confess my treatment of Bell was far from perfect. For months and months I was so sick in body, and so worried with money matters, and so busy with my two new poems, that I was, to say the least, irritable.

AUGUSTA (*trying to comfort* BYRON). Bell loved you so when she married you.

BYRON (*aroused*). I know I'll go to the dogs without her, for she was just the woman to help me to grow away from my weaknesses. And the moment the deed of separation is signed, I shall sink deeper into the slime than I have ever sunk before. (*Bitterly*.) My degeneration will be on her head! (*Fiercely*.) The moral Clytemnestra of her husband!

AUGUSTA (*sweetly*). Oh, don't say that. You still have me, Baby Byron.

BYRON. Dearest Augusta, you always have been my most precious possession, had I but realized it. (*Suddenly*.) Do you know, trouble is coming to me from other sources? Ever since the rumor about a separation leaked out, everything and everybody are becoming increasingly hostile to me. Many of my friends are cutting me right and left. You know nine out of ten Englishmen think George Washington was a traitor, and they're bitterly angry with me because I wrote he was one of the greatest and loftiest of heroes. And the Tory papers attack me by the foulest and vilest names because they have just found out it was I, not Tom Moore, who lampooned the Prince Regent. And even the Whig organs are cool to me—as if they were afraid to identify themselves with me. And the clergy—may their own very special God blast them for it—the clergy, because I don't swallow dogma like champagne, call me anathema. And all the disappointed would-be poets are glorying in my downfall and wreaking on me the ill will engendered by their failure as poets. And people in general are saying the most terrible things about my private character because they believe Bell, the pure Bell, is leaving me for some horrible, hideous, unmentionable sin.

AUGUSTA (*tenderly*). Just never mind them. Never mind any of them.

BYRON (*gloomily*). It's not so easy. And have you heard about Caroline?

AUGUSTA. What? (*Surprised*.) I thought—I thought

you would never see each other any more. But— (*With sudden recollection.*) Oh, I remember now! Bell told me not so long ago that she had heard you were frequenting Melbourne House again. (*Reproachfully.*) Oh, how could you? After—after everything?

BYRON. You misunderstand. I have been going to Melbourne House, to see Lady Melbourne. I couldn't help it if Beautiful Silliness was there, but I give you my word, only a perfunctory and distant nod is all that ever passes between us. Well, what I was going to say is this. The other day, her page brought over the early proof sheets of a novel called *Glenarvon*. Her own novel.

AUGUSTA (*laughing*). Lady Caroline write a novel! (*A pause.*) Still, why not? She comes of bluestockings. Is the novel as absurd as she is?

BYRON (*smiling*). It's about me.

AUGUSTA (*amazed*). Oh!

BYRON. Under a different name, of course. And it makes me out to be a monster. (*Ironically.*) Wasn't it sweet of her, dearest Goosey, to send me advance sheets? First, a woman annoys a man to death and then she puts him into a novel. She wins both ways.

AUGUSTA (*laughing*). When a woman is clever, she's twice as clever as a man.

BYRON. And when a man is sensible, he's twice as sensible as a woman. But the trouble is a man is never sensible where there's a woman concerned, and a woman is always clever where there's a man concerned. (*AUGUSTA laughs.*) And there's a rumor around town that Beautiful Silliness wrote the novel in only one month, and that half the hack writers in London helped her put it together.

AUGUSTA (*sympathetically*). Then I certainly wouldn't worry about it, my poor Baby. I must go now, for the little one's throât hasn't been looking right to me.

BYRON. Oh, I'm sorry to hear that! Give all the children my love. (*With a sudden surge of great self-pity.*) Children, children, yes, that's it. And shall I never see my child, my Ada, again?

AUGUSTA (*sadly*). I had hoped you wouldn't have mentioned your child. (*Ardently.*) Oh, but Ada is a darling, with red round cheeks just like— (*Trying to stop herself from saying "Bell's."*)

BYRON (*holding back the tears*). Yes, say it. Just like Bell's. I noticed the cheeks the time I was permitted to see her.

AUGUSTA (*beginning to weep softly*). My poor brother.

BYRON (*following suit*). Thanks, dearest Augusta—for running in—to console me. You know you're the woman I've always loved best in all the world.

(*They kiss. Exit AUGUSTA in tears, whereupon BYRON seizes a quill and writes, as he composes:*)

Is thy face like thy mother's, my fair child!
Ada! sole daughter of my house and heart?
When last I saw thy young blue eyes they smiled,
And then we parted—not as now we part,
But with a hope—

(*Laying down the quill disconsolately.*)

"But with a hope—but with a hope—"

(*Bursts into hysterical sobs.*)

(*Shortly enter CLARE CLAIMONT. She is a charming and beautiful brunette of eighteen, with fine, though irregular features.*)

CLARE (*with confiding timidity*). This is Lord Byron, I feel sure.

BYRON (*pulling himself together*). Who are you? How did you get in?

CLARE. The street door was open, and I saw no servant about. As to your other question, I am Miss Clairmont, Clare Clairmont.

BYRON (*looking at her in pleased surprise and gradually becoming more and more conscious of her personal charms*). Oh, won't you sit down?

(*Offers her a chair.*)

CLARE (*sitting down*). Thank you for finally answering

my letters. Of course I made many allowances, knowing what a busy man you are.

BYRON (*digging into his memory*). You wanted advice about how to get a stage position. That's it, isn't it?

CLARE (*slowly*). Well—yes. And I went to Drury Lane, and they told me you wouldn't be there to-day, so I thought I'd come here.

BYRON. Have you ever acted before?

CLARE. Only in amateur theatricals.

BYRON (*encouragingly*). What field is your special aim on the stage— (*smiling*) the light, the somber, the gray?

CLARE. My real aim is to act—and yet not to act.

BYRON. Oh, pantomime. That's very interesting.

CLARE. No, not pantomime.

BYRON (*puzzled*). Then really you will have to explain yourself.

CLARE. I'm rather more interested in what acting leads to.

BYRON (*continuing to smile*). An enigmatical maiden. I'll tell you what it leads to. (*Bitterly.*) Acting, like the paths of glory, leads but to the grave.

CLARE. I don't mean that.

BYRON. Well, tell me, I'm waiting.

CLARE. My real reason was that I wanted to tell you something about the poet Shelley.

BYRON (*bursting into laughter, and looking at CLARE with surprise*). Do you know you interest me? Go on. You said the real reason you wanted to go on the stage was that you wanted to tell me something about Shelley. (*Jocosely.*) I'll leave it to you if that isn't a clear case of cause and effect. (*CLARE joins in the laughter.*) Do you know Shelley?

CLARE. Do I know him? Mary Godwin, with whom he's living, is my stepsister.

BYRON (*admiringly*). With your bright eyes, Italian features, and your olive complexion, you hardly look English, for you look so piquant.

CLARE. I do look quite Italian. But I'm English.

BYRON. Who is this—eh—Mary Godwin, with whom

Shelley is living? I haven't heard anything at all about him since he left his wife.

CLARE. She's the woman he eloped with, and she's very clever. (*With girlish enthusiasm.*) She's writing a wonderful romance now called *Frankenstein*. William Godwin, who is her father and is now married to my mother, never has believed in marriage, nor did Mary Woolstencraft, her mother, when she was alive. And I have been brought up to believe as they did.

BYRON (*looking at her keenly, possibly as if he began to surmise something*). Indeed! Do you know I have never met Shelley personally!

CLARE (*eagerly*). I'll arrange a meeting gladly.

BYRON. Thank you. But never mind just now. You say Shelley and Mary Godwin live together?

CLARE. In wonderful harmony. That's the way it should always be with men of genius.

BYRON (*quickly*). What sort of harmony did you say?

CLARE. In wonderful harmony.

BYRON (*bitterly*). Oh, yes. That's been my experience.

CLARE (*impulsively*). Oh, Lord Byron, I've been so sorry to hear of your unhappiness. Let me be the one to bring harmony into your life.

BYRON. I thought you came to see me about going on the stage.

CLARE. I did—maybe—that is, partly. But now my whole object is to bring harmony into your life.

BYRON (*sadly*). You couldn't in all the world have found a more difficult task.

CLARE. No, no, I can do it.

BYRON. How can you do it?

CLARE (*simply*). Because—I love you.

BYRON. See here, Miss Clairmont, I'm very easily influenced by women. Don't tempt me.

CLARE (*pleadingly*). See how happy Shelley is with Mary Godwin.

BYRON (*with emotion*). Can you bring Lady Byron back to me?

CLARE (*slowly*). Perhaps it would be better if she never did go back to you.

BYRON (*amazed*). Now what on earth do you mean by that?

CLARE. I'd love to take her place.

BYRON. You? What nonsense!

CLARE. I'm only a London tradesman's daughter, but I move in a highly intellectual circle.

BYRON (*dismissing the thought*). Oh, you're a mere infant.

CLARE (*protesting*). I'm not an infant in ideas. I told you I was brought up to be a freethinker and not to believe in marriage. Does that sound like being an infant?

BYRON. It certainly does—second infancy.

CLARE (*hurt*). I don't think you're kind to say that sort of thing.

BYRON. Then tell me. Why did your parents—or your step-parents—or whatever they are—finally get married, if they didn't believe in marriage?

CLARE (*matter of fact tone*). Just to give a name to their child, Mary Godwin. That was all.

BYRON (*bursting out laughing*). That was all? Isn't that a good enough reason?

CLARE (*same tone as before*). Is it? I didn't think it was.

BYRON (*not believing his ears*). Should you have us put all our children into foundling hospitals?

CLARE. Why not?

BYRON (*highly amused*). You're very naïve, Miss Clairmont, but you are so pretty. How old are you?

CLARE (*pleased*). Eighteen.

BYRON. Just a child. And I'm an old ogre of twenty-eight.

CLARE (*protesting*). You're no more an ogre than I am a child. Speaking of children, Shelley and Mary Godwin have a child now, you know.

BYRON. Have they, really? No, I didn't know.

CLARE. I'd like to have a child, too.

BYRON. Why not get one from a foundling hospital?

CLARE. It's not the same thing. Now if you could be the father, it would be wonderful.

BYRON. (*laughing gayly*). You know, Miss Clairmont—oh, let me call you Clare—that was the name of one of my dearest friends at the University, Lord Clare. You're a fascinatingly new type of girl. I don't know that I ever have met any one quite like you.

CLARE. I know it. I believe implicitly in my stepfather's theories. And I am sure you are very lonesome, now that Lady Byron has left you. And I believe you are a good man. And I love you.

BYRON. Now tell me the truth, Clare. Why did you write me all those letters asking me for a meeting?

CLARE. I was thrilled by your poetry and saddened by rumors of your matrimonial difficulties.

BYRON. But just why did you come here to-day and ask me how to get on the stage?

CLARE (*confessing*). It was just to get acquainted. I know I'm not suited to the stage.

BYRON. Then tell me—exactly what do you want?

CLARE. Well, the Shelleys are going to Switzerland in a short time. Now everybody knows you're going abroad with Mr. Hobhouse, so I thought—I thought if you were going to Switzerland, I'd go along with the Shelleys, and we could meet there.

BYRON (*interested*). What do you mean by "meet"?

CLARE. Well, I would sort of fill the vacancy in your life—if I may so express it.

BYRON. You mean—

CLARE. Yes, be like a wife.

BYRON (*moodily*). I've lost everything. Why not? (*His mind made up.*) I'll live with you, Clare, and be your love.

CLARE (*overwhelmed with joy*). And I'll be to you all my stepsister is to Shelley! And you'll write such wonderful poems!

BYRON (*amused*). Oh, bother Shelley and your stepsis-

LORD BYRON

ter. You just promise to love me for myself alone, and I'll take care of the poetry.

CLARE (*happily*). I promise.

BYRON (*gallantly*). You must stay and have tea.

CLARE (*gayly*). I take sugar with mine.

BYRON (*laughing*). Oh, yes, I must begin to remember the things you like. Excuse me, while I dig up Fletcher. The household isn't so well managed since Lady Byron—(*Quickly interrupting himself.*) Just make yourself at home.

CLARE (*archly*). You haven't kissed me yet!

BYRON. Imagine yourself as being kissed all the time I'm downstairs.

CLARE. And when you return—do I get a real kiss?

BYRON (*playfully*). Then we'll have tea.

(*Exit BYRON.*)

(CLARE looks about the room and contentedly hums a tune, until she sees a small portrait of LADY BYRON on the wall. She makes a face at it.)

CURTAIN

SCENE SIX

TIME: *A few weeks later. A spring morning.*

PLACE: *Same as Scene Four.*

[*The books and pictures have all been taken away.*]

As the curtain rises, FLETCHER and two other servants are discovered scampering around, getting trunks and things together. BYRON and HOBHOUSE are anxiously watching, through the windows, the crowds gathering.]

BYRON (*amazed*). The crowd is getting bigger and bigger!

HOBHOUSE. Never mind them, Byron.

BYRON. But do you think there's danger? (*To FLETCHER.*) Fletcher, do you think there's danger?

FLETCHER. I'd like to see them start any trouble, my lord.

BYRON (*pleased*). Thanks, Fletcher.

HOBHOUSE. I'm afraid of a bailiff. If he gets here in time, he'll seize your trunks and everything you've got, including your carriage, just as former bailiffs have already seized your pictures and books.

BYRON. Then let's get out quickly! (*Suddenly stops to listen. Shouting is heard off stage.*) Do you hear that shouting?

HOBHOUSE. It seems to be pretty bad. (*To FLETCHER.*) Quick, Fletcher!

BYRON (*as he sees FLETCHER seize a small parcel.*) What's in that, Fletcher?

HOBHOUSE (*impatiently*). Hurry, Byron, hurry!

FLETCHER. It just arrived this morning.

BYRON. Open it up. Who'd be sending me parcels now?

(*FLETCHER rapidly opens it up; and finally brings out a most exquisitely bound volume, and hands it to*

BYRON.)

HOBHOUSE (*in teasing admiration*). Some beautiful lady has had your poems beautifully bound and is sending them to you.

BYRON (*turning the pages*). As I live! From Caroline Lamb! A complete copy of her novel! (*Discovering a note, he reads aloud*.) "This is from your once adored Caroline, who is sending you this exposure of your villainy. It may interest you to know that recently I have burned you in effigy. At least, if I am not loved, I'll see that I am detested."

HOBHOUSE (*highly amused*). Her foresight is good.

BYRON (*abstractedly*). She has never forgiven me for not sending back her—trinkets.

HOBHOUSE (*inquiringly*). What trinkets?

BYRON (*hesitatingly*). Oh, some women's garments—that she had given me.

HOBHOUSE. Well, why didn't you return them? You might as well have spared her feelings.

BYRON. I—I couldn't send them back.

HOBHOUSE. Why not?

BYRON (*reluctantly*). You see—I had given them away—here—and there.

HOBHOUSE (*bursting out laughing*). You bad boy! (*Serious tone again*.) Hurry, Byron, hurry!

BYRON (*picking up a book*). Are you ready, Fletcher? All the bags ready? Bob ready? Morris ready? (*Chorus of "Yes, my lord."*) Then Dover in twelve hours! Out we go—now! (*As he stops to open a window, a storm of abuse meets him. Shouts of "Traitor," "Atheist," "Libertine," are clearly heard over the discordant voices. BYRON draws back, startled, but holds his ground proudly. Amused tone, to HOBHOUSE.*) You'd really think I was Antichrist!

HOBHOUSE. Don't jest! Quick! I don't like their manner! I'll get in front of you!

BYRON (*with bravado*). Before I die, I'll make them think I really am Antichrist!

HOBHOUSE. Don't be absurd! Don't you see you're carrying in your hand Augusta's present—a new Bible?

LORD BYRON

BYRON (*convulsed at the ridiculousness of the situation*). Antichrist holding a Bible! No matter how hard I try, it seems I can't be the villain people tell me I am.

(*Exit BYRON, preceded by HOBHOUSE and followed by FLETCHER and the other two servants. When the stage is bare, one hears imprecations and shouts of derision outdoors. Shortly enter the Scotch BAILIFF who appeared in Scene Four. He looks around in vast disappointment.*)

BAILIFF. Gone! (*Sympathetically.*) He was verra mooch interested in why I got spliced. But my advice didna help him ane wee bit.

CURTAIN

SCENE SEVEN

TIME: *Seven years later.—Night.*

PLACE: *Venice.*

[*A room in the Palazzo Moncenigo. This room suggests, on a small scale, a baronial hall. A long table left center, with inkstand and quills and some books. Soda bottles and drinking glasses on the table. A door left, a door right, both well forward.*

BYRON, with a suggestion of grossness in his appearance, is half sitting, half reclining on a couch that is drawn up against this table. He rests his head on one arm, meditatively, in the process of composing. His other arm, thrown over his knees, holds a book lightly. He seems very sleepy.

The walls of the room are hung with oil paintings, the numerous chairs are richly upholstered, the beamed ceiling from which a handsome chandelier with crystal pendants hangs is highly decorated. A pair of candelabra and other ornaments are on a second table up stage.

BYRON mixes a drink, and drowzes. Soon he is fast asleep.]

BEGINNING OF BYRON'S DREAM

(*Mysteriously, from door right, a careworn female figure, bearing traces of earlier beauty, slowly advances and crosses to door left. She stretches out her pleading arms to BYRON. As she disappears door left, she cries, "I am Clare! I am Clare! The mother of Allegra! Why don't you ever let me see our child?"*)

BYRON (*rising from his sleep and casting contemptuous*

looks after her—speaking ironically). They say you have a younger child in a foundling asylum! Whose is it?

(From door right, there comes MARIANNA SEGATI. She is a very lovely Italian girl, with large black, Oriental eyes, regular features, and a light and pretty figure.)

MARIANNA (softly, as she throws seductive glances at BYRON). I am Marianna—you remember Marianna?

BYRON (sarcastically). Oh, yes, I remember. I remember also the diamonds which a jeweler tried to sell me—shortly after I had made you a present of them. Very shortly. Oh, go away. Go back to your husband, the linen draper.

(MARIANNA throws hateful looks at him, shakes her fist, stamps her foot, and shows the unrestrained violence of her race.)

(As she likewise disappears door left, there emerges door right, MARGARITA COGNI. She is a black-haired Italian beauty in full bloom, brilliant eyes, magnificently tall, statuesque, and very ignorant. She wears the Italian dress of the lower orders, but absurdly crowns it with a freakish, modish hat with feathers, that is absolutely out of harmony with the rest of her costume.)

BYRON (bursting out laughing). Take off that hat, Margarita.

MARGARITA. I think it is very pretty, signore. (As she prinks—speaking with vanity.) Please say you have always loved me better than that homely Marianna.

BYRON. Margarita, you were a fine animal, but quite untamable. (MARGARITA smiles with pleasure.) And you were the best housekeeper I ever had. You saved money for me.

MARGARITA (gratified). Thank you, signore.

BYRON. And I've no doubt you saved some for yourself.

MARGARITA (offended). Signore!

BYRON. Never mind, Margarita. It was worth it.

MARGARITA. I must scold you for making me go back to my husband.

BYRON (*humorously*). Scold away, Margarita, the baker's wife. I liked you in spite of your sharp tongue. But finally you became altogether too masterful and tempestuous. Luckily you never learned to read or write, or you would have deluged me with letters, and that would have been the very devil.

(As she disappears door left, there comes from door right a horrid stream of vulgar women, slatterns, prostitutes, hags, who look leeringly at BYRON, as they move across the stage.)

BYRON (*arrogantly*). There is nothing in the world too low for me to stoop to in my debauchery! Now you cursed self-righteous English public, what do you say to me now? Have I made real your filthy thoughts about me? (*But nevertheless he follows up this remark by shuddering at his own iniquity in loathsome disgust. Fiercely.*) Annabel, it's all your fault! Why did you again reject my recent offer of reconciliation?

(As this troop, in its turn, disappears door left, there comes into view door right, a charming apparition, a young Italian girl of twenty, blonde, with a plump figure, and a most engaging smile. This is the COUNTESS TERESA GUICCIOLI.)

TERESA (*going to BYRON, bending over and kissing him affectionately*). It is Teresa, your last and best love.

(BYRON'S face lights up, and he fondles her for a few moments, whereupon his brow grows clouded.)

BYRON. Go away.

TERESA (*hurt and surprised*). Go away?

BYRON. Yes.

TERESA. I have made you so happy. You yourself have said it.

BYRON (*bitterly*). No man can be really happy away from his native land in the embraces of a foreign woman.

TERESA (*proudly*). But I am a noblewoman.

BYRON. That doesn't alter the case.

TERESA (*chagrined*). You did not always speak thus.

BYRON (*sullenly*). That's the conclusion I have come to now. (*Accusingly*.) I told you not to get a separation from the count, your husband.

TERESA. How could I help it when I loved but you? He was sixty years old, and I was sixteen, when they took me from the convent to be his bride—his third bride.

BYRON. But you didn't have to get a separation! Now you are like a leech! You hang on to me so! I want to be free of you! Free, I tell you! Free of all women!

TERESA. But I love you.

BYRON. Go away! I seem to see you, after I die, visiting the capitals of Europe and boasting that you were the last mistress of the noble English lord, Lord Byron!

TERESA (*as if not hearing him, and reflecting only her love*). But you mustn't die.

BYRON (*motioning her away*). Go! Go! Go! You're a sort of Italian Caroline Lamb, only prettier and not so empty headed.

(TERESA looks overwhelmingly reproachful at BYRON's indifference. Then, with her hand to her heart, in the utmost affliction, she too, like the others, moves slowly across the stage to door left. BYRON sinks on his couch, exhausted, and sleeps again.)

END OF THE DREAM

(BYRON restlessly rouses himself as if he had been going through a nightmare, then stands erect, facing the door out of which all his loves had passed, with a look of horror. He is now wide awake.)

BYRON (*agonizingly*). Enough! Enough! I want Anna-bel! I want my daughter Ada! I'm so bitterly lonely! No country! No family! No Hobhouse! No Tom Moore! A stranger in a strange land! How I suffer because I am an exile! How I hate everybody! I must do something! I'll become a man of action! I'm sick of being a poet! Ten poets aren't so useful as a good dentist!

I'll go to Greece! I'll strike a giant blow for Greece! With all my wealth! With all my talents! Then let me die—there on the battlefield! (*Suddenly entertained by the leaps of his own fancy.*) Or perhaps I'll drive out the Turks! And then perhaps I'll be made king! And then I'll return to England, wearing a scarlet uniform richly embroidered with gold, two heavy epaulets, a formidable sword more dangerous to me than to the enemy, and a helmet huger than the one Hector scared his baby son with in the *Iliad*! And I'll receive royal honors! And dine with His Fat Majesty at Windsor! That would be funny! (*Laughing sardonically.*) And my charming countrymen will all hail me Greece's Liberator! And I'll cut them all dead. (*Soberly.*) But if I perish—if I perish—then still the world will remember my words:

The mountains look on Marathon,
And Marathon looks on the sea;
And musing there an hour alone,
I dreamed that Greece might still be free.

(*He walks about in feverish haste, as if making preparations for a journey.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE EIGHT

TIME: *The following year. Late at night.*

PLACE: *London. In AUGUSTA's home, a simple room, hung with black. Door left, door right. Masses of flowers here and there. Floral piece, "He died for Greece." In the center of the room a casket covered with a black pall, topped by a sword and a crown of laurel candles. The room is empty, save for FLETCHER, HOBHOUSE, and AUGUSTA, who are near door left.*

They all seem to have been crying.

HOBHOUSE (*to AUGUSTA*). What immense crowds have been here these two days.

AUGUSTA (*bitterly*). Now they can't admire him enough.

HOBHOUSE. And so many wore mourning.

AUGUSTA (*her grief increasing*). Yet Lady Byron wouldn't come.

HOBHOUSE (*ironically*). She wrote me she thought the funeral arrangements could best be left in my hands.

AUGUSTA. Still we mustn't be too hard. Perhaps my brother deserved no more from her. (*Turns to FLETCHER.*) Do tell me again your master's last words.

HOBHOUSE. It will only make you cry more.

FLETCHER (*almost in tears*). First he said, "Annabel! Ada! Augusta!" (*AUGUSTA sobs. HOBHOUSE is much affected.*) And then I said, "The Lord's will be done." And he said, "Yes, not mine."

HOBHOUSE (*pointing to door right, where a figure is seen to enter.*) Look! Who can that be at this late hour?

AUGUSTA (*wiping her eyes—in amazement*). Not Caroline! Is it possible she hasn't gone yet!

(*LADY CAROLINE, looking haggard and strikingly older than in the earlier scenes, pallid, opium-driven, in an advanced stage of dropsy, moves noiselessly to the*

casket, as if drawn by a magnet, and partially lifting the pall, gazes long and earnestly therein.)

HOBHOUSE (*in a whisper*). I'll leave you alone with her. Come, Fletcher.

(HOBHOUSE and FLETCHER *begin to go quietly.*)

AUGUSTA. Poor Caro!

(*With a good-night smile to them as they exeunt door left, she advances toward CAROLINE.*)

LADY CAROLINE (*as in a trance*). Your beautiful pale face was my fate.

(*Overcome, she is falling, when AUGUSTA catches her in her arms.*)

CURTAIN

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